

ANALYSIS OF MR. TENNYSON'S
'IN MEMORIAM'

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THE REV. F. W. ROBERTSON



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ANALYSIS OF MR. TENNYSON'S

“IN MEMORIAM.”

By the late

REV. FREDERICK W. ROBERTSON

OF BRIGHTON.

TWELFTH EDITION.

LONDON:

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1884.

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BY PERMISSION, THESE NOTES ON THE

“IN MEMORIAM”

ARE DEDICATED TO

ALFRED TENNYSON, D.C.L.

POET LAUREATE,

IN TOKEN OF THEIR AUTHOR'S REVERENCE

FOR HIS WORKS.



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PREFACE.



THE following Notes on "In Memoriam" were written by Mr. Robertson at the request of a friend; and now that the memory of the Writer holds in so many minds a position analogous to that described in the Poem, it has been thought that these Notes might interest the much wider public who know Mr. Robertson only through his works.

The subjoined extract from a Lecture on Poetry delivered by Mr. Robertson several years ago will serve to indicate his general estimate of this exquisite Poem:—

PREFACE.

“ This Lecture* will be appropriately closed by a brief notice of the last work of our chief living poet, Alfred Tennyson.

“ The poem entitled ‘ In Memoriam ’ is a monument erected by friendship to the memory of a gifted son of the historian Hallam. It is divided into a number of cabinet-like compartments, which, with fine and delicate shades of difference, exhibit the various phases through which the bereaved spirit passes from the first shock of despair, dull, hopeless misery and rebellion, up to the dawn of hope, acquiescent trust, and even calm happiness again. In the meanwhile many a question has been solved, which can only suggest itself when suffering forces the soul to front the realities of our mysterious existence; such as: Is there indeed a life-

* From “ Lectures and Addresses,” by the Rev. F. W. Robertson. Pp. 124-126.

PREFACE.

to come? And if there is, will it be a conscious life? Shall I know that myself? Will there be mutual recognition? continuance of attachments? Shall friend meet friend, and brother brother, as friends and brothers? Or, again: How comes it that one so gifted was taken away so early, in the maturity of his powers, just at the moment when they seemed about to become available to mankind? What means all this, and is there not something wrong? Is the law of Creation Love indeed?

“By slow degrees, all these doubts, and worse, are answered; not as a philosopher would answer them, nor as a theologian, or a metaphysician, but as it is the duty of a poet to reply, by intuitive faculty, in strains in which Imagination predominates over Thought and Memory. And one of the manifold beauties of this exquisite poem, and

PREFACE.

which is another characteristic of true Poetry, is that, piercing through all the sophistries and over-refinements of speculation, and the lifeless scepticism of science, it falls back upon the grand, primary, simple truths of our Humanity; those first principles which underlie all creeds, which belong to our earliest childhood, and on which the wisest and best have rested through all ages: that all is right: that darkness shall be clear: that God and Time are the only interpreters: that Love is king: that the Immortal is in us: that—which is the key-note of the whole.—

‘all is well, though Faith and Form
Be Sundered in the night of fear.’

*

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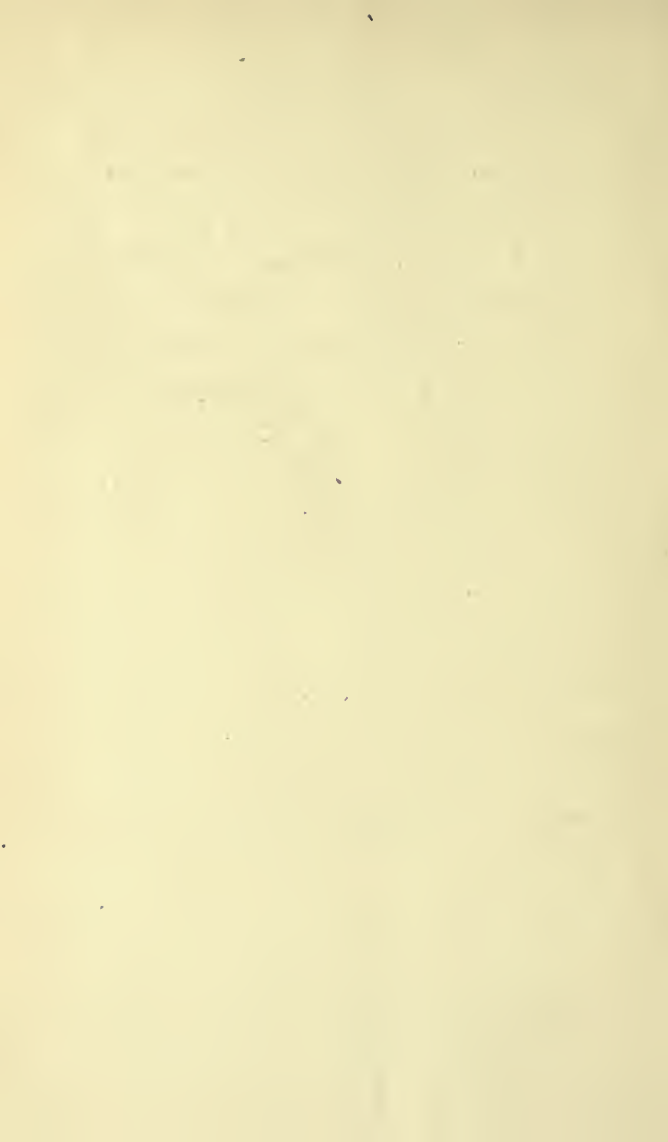
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“To a coarser class of minds ‘In
Memoriam’ appears too melancholy: one

PREFACE.

long monotone of grief. It is simply one of the most victorious songs that ever poet chanted : with the mysterious undertone, no doubt, of sadness which belongs to all human joy, in front of the mysteries of death and sorrow ; but that belongs to ' Paradise Regained ' as well as to ' Paradise Lost : ' to every true note, indeed, of human triumph except a Bacchanalian drinking song. And that it should predominate in a monumental record is not particularly unnatural. But readers who never dream of mastering the plan of a work before they pretend to criticise details, can scarcely be expected to perceive that the wail passes into a hymn of solemn and peaceful beauty before it closes."



ANALYSIS
OF
"IN MEMORIAM."



I

Loss may be gain when Grief is cherished
by Love.



2

FIRST mood of sorrow. The eternal
gloom of the yew tree is felt to be
congenial.

ANALYSIS OF

3

MISGIVINGS respecting the wisdom of cherishing grief, seeing it has robed the universe in its own darkness.

4

STRUGGLE of the Will with the helplessness and aimlessness of grief

5

THE heart finds relief in metrical expression.

INSUFFICIENCY of the common-place consolation suggested by the commonness of hereavement.

DESOLATION realifed. The well-known door in the dawn of a grey, drizzling morning.

ANALYSIS OF

8

FADING of the light from all things in the absence of the loved. The fostered flower.

9

BENISON on the ship which brings back the remains of one "more than a brother."

A CERTAIN natural instinct of feeling connects the idea of rest with a Christian grave on shore rather than with one at sea.

THE calm.

ABSENCE in spirit with the ship.

TEARS of the widowed heart.

NATURAL conception of the departed as if he were living still. Death at first impossible to realife. (Compare Wordsworth's "We are Seven.")

SIMULTANEOUS feelings of calm despair and wild unrest finding something in the tempest both harmonious and discordant with themselves.

16

SURPRISE at the contrast between the apparently inconsistent forms of grief.

17

THE ship arrives ; henceforth sacred to imagination.

18

THE quiet English grave. Funeral feelings.

THE periodical ebb and flow of grief.

MUTE moods of grief, and moods which find utterance.

RUDE blame cast upon these complaints : yet great Nature has her way, and Sorrow its rights.

THE shadow of death.

RECOLLECTIONS of early communings.

QUERY: How much the Past owes its
seeming perfectness to imagination?

R EPLY : Life's burden was halved by Love.
It is so halved no longer.

T HE idea of death less dreadful than the
conception of the possibility of forgetting.

T o have loved is blessedness in itself.

28

SOOTHING power of Christmas bells, which blend old associations of boyhood with present bitterness.

29

CHRISTMAS-EVE kept for ancient custom's sake.

30

CHRISTMAS - DAY. Successive moods.
Forced mirth succeeded by tears, silence,
and then by degrees sweeter hope.

PRESENT state of the departed. Questions thereon suggested by the peculiar case of Lazarus.

LAZARUS' sister. Love superseded and intensified by higher love.

DANGER of unsettling simple faith by unfixing it from form.

34

THE universe a dark enigma, and life meaningless, separate from the supposition of immortality.

35

AND love itself without that belief would be a satyr's feeling.

36

THE blessing of having Truth incarnated in a Life in Christ.

37

THE apology. Appearance of profanation
in the introduction of revealed truths.

38

ADREARY path solaced by song.

39

[Not published in the early Editions.]

40

DEATH the spirit's bridal-day. But the
bride returns to her friends : not so the spirit.

41

VAGUE suspicion of eternal severance by immeasurable inferiority.

42

YET reunion in place may restore the attitude of loving discipleship in spite of inferiority.

43

IF death be unconscious trance, love, as after sleep, will begin again.

44

Is the life beyond merely oblivion, mixed up with gleams of recollection, as here?

45

Is this material existence given to teach the "Me" and the "Not Me?"

46

THE five years of past friendship will be a warm and fresh memory hereafter.

LOVE shrinks from Pantheism, and demands mutual recognition and separate identity hereafter.

THESSE lays are phases of feeling rather than accurate investigations of the deep questions mooted in them.

THEY play upon the surface of grief, but leave its deeps untouched.

HE shall be a light, a life, a faith, a hope,
a presence.

I FEAR not the eye of the (like God)
all-seeing dead.

I WILL not complain because my love is
imperfect. There is a needs-be even in
fault. It may be mourned too much.

53

THE needs-be of evil is truth in retrospect,
falsehood and perilous in prospect.

54

OUT of the human heart a vague cry
anticipates the final eduction of good from evil.

55

BUT Nature and Experience seeming to
negative the hope of individual immortality,
there is nothing left to rest it on but Faith.

56

THE hideous "No" of Nature.

57

THE echo of the funeral bell.

58

A LOFTIER mood of farewell.

59

[Not published in the First Edition.]

60

LOWLY love: its misgivings.

61

YET it can plead, even to one sublimely
above it, that it is love.

62

THOUGH an unworthy love, once past,
perishes.

YET the higher Being may in some sort feel for the affection borne to it by the inferior.

DOES the spirit retain tender recollections of its former home and former friend?

PERCHANCE then, that friend's former influence may still incite to noble ends.

66

IN the midst of utter desolation there comes a kindly cheerfulness like that of the blind.

67

ON retiring to rest, Fancy pictures the appearance of the Tablet in different hours and lights.

68

IN dreams, by an illusion, the sadness of the mourner is transferred to the lost, and he is conceived of as sad too.

69

VISION of the Angel and the Crown of
thorns.

70

DARKNESS. Attempt to recall the well-
known features. Fancy fantastically blends
the image of the lost with the objects of a
confused phantasmagoria.

71

AT last one epoch of past history presents
itself with singular vividness.

A NNIVERSARY of the loss. A grey, cheerless day.

R EGRET for the cutting short of the promise of fame, stilled, however, by the thought that all fame fades, and that it is enough to know that there was that which would have achieved fame.

Now that he is dead, his kindred with the wisest and best becomes recognised as a family likeness.

SOMEWHERE, surely, in the universe, he is now achieving fame.

FLEETINGNESS of reputation here.

77

THESE lays will be forgotten: but they
are breathed not for fame: only for relief.

78

ANOTHER Christmas. Tears are dried.
There is even mirth; but beneath, the
quiet sense of something lost still remains.

79

FRIENDSHIP, why more than brotherhood.
A brother is oneself over again. A friend
is the supplement of deficiencies.

80

How would he have felt my loss? Let me try so to feel his.

81

WELL, death has matured the love which I might mourn as prematurely cut off.

82

THE real bitterness of death is the interruption of communion.

83

THE new year. Renewal of hope.

84

A CONCEPTION of what he would have been had he lived to be united by ties of blood: a blended life and united death.

85

A SECOND friendship possible: but not equal
to the first. |

86

PEACE coming through natural influences.

87

RECOLLECTIONS of the college friendship.

88

THE contrasts of fierce grief and wild joy
in the nightingale's song.

89

RECOLLECTIONS of his going down to the
country retreat.

NO alteration of circumstances, no new relationships, could make his return to life unwelcome.

THE thought of him associates itself brightly with the spring.

THE certainty of separation has become fixed. (Contrast this with the sentiment of No. 14.)

93

YET surely, his very self might return.
Oh come!

94

SERENITY of soul needful for communion
with the dead.

95

REPERUSAL of his letters after a summer
evening spent upon the lawn.

96

How he emerged into faith through doubt.

97

A FRIENDSHIP which resembled a marriage,
the union of a male and female spirit.

98

VIENNA, where he died: a glorious city
— to his conception, dismal.

ANOTHER anniversary of his death. To many, as to me, one of sorrow. They are my brothers.

ON this day all things bring him back to me by association: and he dies afresh.

THOUGHTS on quitting the home of childhood. Round all these spots and objects new associations will gather for strangers.

EVERY spot has a twofold association: one of happy childhood, the other of bereaved friendship.

THE night before the departure a vision presents the thought, that, his memory going with us, the spirit of all that is wise and good and graceful sails with us in the life-voyage.

THE sound of the unfamiliar church bells
(of the new parish) heard by night.

CHRISTMAS-EVE in the new home — how
different! Old customs cannot be trans-
planted hither.

NEW year bells. "Forget the things
behind."

107

HIS birthday celebrated cheerfully.

108

HUMAN sympathy needful to ripen the
fruit of sorrow.

109

WHAT he was.

110

HIS influence on others.

III

THE perfect gentleman.

III

THE inexhaustibleness and growth of his nature.

III

ONE who would have been equal to all emergencies.

III

KNOWLEDGE less high than charity. In him both were blended.

115

SPRING: and spring hopes.

116

REVIVING Nature suggests feelings in which regret for past friendship passes away in anticipations of a stronger bond which is to be.

117

THIS separation will only enhance the blessedness of meeting.

THE past history of creation, passing from chaos into life, is a type of our existence, which surely is to ascend from the animal into the spiritual. He is nobler than he was.

MEMORY can recall and dwell upon the thought of him now without a pang.

THE good which has come from these utterances, proves the ethereal nature of our humanity, which is influenced by causes more subtle and refined than the phrenologist and materialist dream of.

HESPER - PHOSPHOR. Grief has slowly changed its mood, as the evening star passes into the morning star.

122

A PROFOUND sense of blessedness, amounting even to ecstasy.

123

NO farewell to him. Amidst the changefulness of the outward world, my spirit remains steadfast.

124

THE atheism of the Understanding is annihilated by the Heart. We feel God — do not find Him out.

125

E^{VEN} in the bitterest notes of these strains, Love and Hope were never entirely absent.

126

L^{OVE} says, “All is well.”

127

A^{MIDST} the anarchy of nations, all is moving on to God, and *his* spirit knows it.

THIS struggle and victory of Love with Doubt have given an insight into the course of human things, and taught trust in the final issue.

POWER in this friendship to ennoble life; and reciprocal influence of a noble life to intensify the friendship.

130

HE becomes an universal Presence, to be felt everywhere, and for ever.

131

THERE are truths which are to be proved only by faith and feeling.

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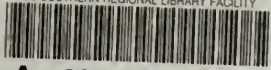
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